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English II Period 8

22 March 2011

I Can Make the Right Desicion

*“Life is the sum of all your choices.” –Albert Camus*

We all are required at some point in time to make a significant decision with a rewarding end result. My own personal decision required maturity and the ability to leave a part of my innocence and childhood behind. This decision took place over a few weeks time in April, two years ago. I endured pain, tears, and possible traumatization, but I’m still here and have grown from the experience. I am proud to say that I made the right decision, completed a successful attempt to leave a part of my childhood behind, and boarded the train that would journey into adulthood over time.

At my trainer’s instruction, I steered Buzz around a corner and towards an ominous looking fence adorned with smiley face designs. It was a clear April afternoon, warm enough to ride outdoors. The hay and sweat smell of horses and dust from the arena was all around me, the wind in my face as Buzz moved swiftly underneath me. One, two, three, I counted the strides as the pony cantered up to the fence. Four, five, six. Usually, ponies leave for takeoff about a foot away from the jump. As I continued to count and the jump grew closer, I realized Buzz’s timing was too far away. Before I could do anything about it, the pony gathered himself for takeoff. I grabbed a handful of his mane as he took a HUGE leap over the fence. The impact of his landing on the other side caused me to fall forward on his neck. Before I could pull myself upright, Buzz pulled his head down, and bucked. The force of his hind end coming upwards pushed me even farther out of the saddle, closer to his ears. I had no balance, and knew I was going down.

I felt myself falling down past Buzz’s shoulder as he kept moving forward. Usually when I fall off a horse, the ground looms in front of me until I hit it hard. This time, I hit the dirt head first, the impact like a brick to the face. I could not even see the ground coming. Before I knew it, I was on my back. The scent of dirt and dust was strong in my face. My head was going to explode. As I lay dazed in the dirt looking up to the sky, I was horrified to discover that I was fighting to breathe. My trainer Ashley had come over to make sure I was okay. “I can’t breathe,” I remember telling her, “I can’t breathe.” Having the wind knocked out of me is something I had experienced before, falling off a different horse in a similar fashion. The prior knowledge of the injury gave me no reassurance in this setting, and to this day it is the scariest thing I have ever experienced. I did manage to catch my breath eventually, and stood up soon after that. All was quiet, my pony had been caught, and the smiley faces on that jump were laughing at me. Nevertheless, I was able to walk away that afternoon with no serious injuries, or so I had thought.

I took a few weeks off riding to recover. The morning after my fall, I had woken up with a sore left arm, which had been in the way during my roll from head to back. It hurt to move, so riding was out of the question. I also had a slight pain in my chest, which did not seem to bother me unless I ran. I soon ignored it. Once my mother suggested we go back to ride again, I did not have an answer other than yes. My arm was completely healed, but the nagging chest pain was still there. I chose to ignore it. Once back at the barn, Ashley had let me ride Prince, another pony that I knew really well. I got on and walked around for a bit. My chest hurt a little, but it was not too bad. Once I started to trot though, it got a lot worse. I could not even make it halfway around the ring. Ashley did not seem concerned when I pulled up Prince beside her. “Are you sure you’re just not nervous?” she asked. The only noise I heard during the following pause was the swishing of Prince’s tail, and the familiar jingle his bridle sounded as he shook his head impatiently. I got off the pony and shook my head no. “I’m just not ready yet.” It had been the first time I had ever voluntarily gotten off a horse and left the stables. I even cried on the way home because I was so disappointed.

After a visit to the doctor, I was told my chest muscles were sore from fighting to breathe. A few more weeks off gave them time to recover. I did eventually go back to ride, but never on Buzz again. Even though the pony caused me serious pain, he ended up teaching me a very important lesson: listen to your body when something is not right. Everyone may feel tempted to override their feelings and continue doing what they want to, but I felt proud that I had made the decision to get off because I was not ready to ride again yet, no matter how much I really wanted to. It is one of the few times in my life that I felt I left irresponsible childhood actions behind and took the mature adult road instead. Life is the sum of all our choices, and the choice I made that day could have affected my life in a bad way. I am happy to say it did not.

I am still riding as of today, and have taken more falls since that afternoon on Buzz. None of them have been as serious, but I feel I know enough now to stop if something is not right. It gives me confidence to know I can make the right decision.